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FM AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0759
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0583
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0192
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0135
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0134
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 0145
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 0148
RUEHGZ/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE 0206
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC 0193
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC 0189

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUANGZHOU 000414

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: THE LIMITS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN GUANGZHOU

¶1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY ECONOMIC/POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF STEPHAN LANG
FOR REASON 1.4 (D).

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: SELF-CENSORSHIP IS WIDESPREAD IN THE LECTURE HALLS
AND PUBLICATIONS OF GUANGZHOU UNIVERSITIES, WHERE PROFESSORS

GENERALLY CHOOSE NOT TO SPEAK OR WRITE OPENLY ABOUT SENSITIVE SUBJECTS SUCH AS TIANANMEN, TIBET, THE FALUN GONG AND MINORITY ISSUES, ACCORDING TO OUR CONTACTS IN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY. THIS SELF-CENSORSHIP APPEARS TO BE EFFECTIVE -- THE PROFESSORS WE SPOKE TO SAID THEY WERE UNAWARE OF CASES IN WHICH FACULTY HAD BEEN DISMISSED DUE TO THE POLITICAL CONTENT OF THEIR TEACHINGS OR WRITINGS. HOWEVER, THEY DESCRIBED SEVERAL INCIDENTS IN WHICH PROFESSORS HAD CROSSED A LINE AND DREW A RESPONSE FROM UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES. THESE EXAMPLES ILLUSTRATE HOW TOLERANCE VARIES AMONG INSTITUTIONS. MANY PROFESSORS HAVE DISCOVERED CREATIVE WAYS TO EDUCATE THEIR STUDENTS ABOUT THESE SUBJECTS ANYWAY. GIVEN GUANGZHOU'S EASY ACCESS TO HONG KONG MEDIA SOURCES, OUR CONTACTS CONCUR THAT ACADEMIA IN GUANGZHOU IS MORE LIBERAL THAN IN MOST OTHER PARTS OF CHINA. END SUMMARY.

THE PRACTICE OF SELF-CENSORSHIP

¶3. (C) SELF-CENSORSHIP IS WIDELY PRACTICED BY UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS IN GUANGZHOU, ACCORDING TO OUR CONTACTS AT LOCAL SCHOOLS. CERTAIN SENSITIVE POLITICAL ISSUES ARE NOT DISCUSSED OPENLY IN LECTURES OR PUBLICATIONS. DESCRIBING HIS COLLEAGUES WHO TEACH COURSES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, PROFESSOR WANG ZHENFU OF SOUTH CHINA AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY SAID, "THEY KNOW HOW TO CONTROL THEMSELVES... NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT JUNE 4, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT." EVEN PROFESSOR CHEN HANXI, FROM THE GUANGDONG UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN STUDIES, WHO FIRST ASSERTED THAT NO LIMITATIONS EXISTED ON HIS UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, LATER STATED THAT "IT IS NOT GOOD TO CHALLENGE THE POLICY OF OUR GOVERNMENT."

¶4. (C) PROFESSORS PRACTICE SELF-CENSORSHIP FOR AN IMPORTANT ECONOMIC REASON, TOO, ACCORDING TO DR. CHING MAYBO AT SUN YAT-SEN UNIVERSITY. EACH YEAR, UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS MUST APPLY TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION FOR BUDGETARY FUNDING. SHE EXPLAINED THAT THE FUNDING DECISIONS COULD BE AFFECTED BY REPORTS THAT PROFESSORS HAD TAUGHT POLITICALLY SENSITIVE MATERIAL. IF FUNDING IS DENIED FOR ANY REASON, SHE SAID, "IT WILL DECREASE YOUR OPPORTUNITY FOR SURVIVAL" IN A COMPETITIVE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT.

INVOLVEMENT BY UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES: PUNISHMENT OR PROTECTION?

¶5. (SBU) OUR ACADEMIC CONTACTS IDENTIFIED THE USUAL SLATE OF SENSITIVE ISSUES, INCLUDING TIANANMEN, TIBET, THE FALUN GONG AND MINORITY POPULATIONS, BUT GENERALLY SPEAKING, ANY CRITICISM OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY, IF REPORTED, RESULTS IN SOME ACTION BY UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS. ALL OF OUR CONTACTS CLAIMED THEY WERE UNAWARE OF ANY INCIDENTS IN WHICH FACULTY HAD BEEN DISMISSED FROM THEIR UNIVERSITIES FOR OVER-STEPPING POLITICAL BOUNDARIES. HOWEVER, SEVERAL PROFESSORS

DESCRIBED INCIDENTS THAT RESULTED IN ACTION BY UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES. THE LEVEL OF TOLERANCE DIFFERS BY UNIVERSITY AND DEPENDS ON WHO IS IN CHARGE, BUT BASED ON OUR CONVERSATIONS, IT APPEARS THAT THE MORE PROMINENT UNIVERSITIES TEND TO FOSTER MORE ACADEMIC FREEDOM.

¶6. (C) PROFESSOR WANG YUNXIANG OF THE GUANGDONG UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN STUDIES, WHO ONCE SERVED AS THE DEAN OF THE INSTITUTION'S LAW SCHOOL, WAS ALLEGEDLY DEMOTED FROM HIS CHAIRMANSHIP WITHOUT EXPLANATION AFTER A VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT'S INTERNATIONAL VISITORS PROGRAM. HE CLAIMED HIS MEETING WITH SECRETARY OF STATE COLIN POWELL WAS THE REASON FOR HIS DEMOTION.

¶7. (C) IN ANOTHER INCIDENT AT SOUTH CHINA AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY, UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ALLEGEDLY REPORTED THAT THEIR PROFESSOR HAD BEEN CRITICIZING MAO. THE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT DECIDED TO TRANSFER THE PROFESSOR TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL WHERE HE COULD TEACH MASTER'S AND PH.D. CANDIDATES. "THERE IS MORE FREEDOM WHEN TEACHING MASTER'S AND PH.D. STUDENTS BECAUSE WE HAVE TO SHAPE THE UNDERGRADUATES' WAY OF THINKING," SAID PROFESSOR WANG ZHENFU. HE CALLED THIS SYSTEM "MORALITY-BASED EDUCATION."

¶8. (C) FINALLY, IN ONE SITUATION SEVERAL YEARS AGO AT SUN YAT-SEN UNIVERSITY, A PROMINENT GUANGZHOU INSTITUTION, A STUDENT FILED A COMPLAINT AGAINST A PROFESSOR WHO HAD LECTURED ABOUT DEMOCRACY. INSTEAD OF A DEMOTION OR A TRANSFER, THIS PROFESSOR RECEIVED THE ASSISTANCE OF THE UNIVERSITY'S PARTY SECRETARY. ACCORDING TO PROFESSOR CHING MAYBO, THE PARTY SECRETARY ORGANIZED A HIGH-PROFILE, PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN AN ATTEMPT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE SCHOOL'S FACULTY "WAS STICKING TO THE PARTY LINE."

AGENTS PROVOCATEUR?

¶9. (C) STUDENTS ASPIRING TO JOIN THE COMMUNIST PARTY TEND TO BE MORE LIKELY TO REPORT THEIR PROFESSORS, ACCORDING TO OUR CONTACTS. HOWEVER, THERE ARE ALSO THOSE CURIOUS TYPES WHO WILL INITIATE CONVERSATIONS ON SENSITIVE SUBJECTS WITH THEIR PROFESSORS. IN THAT CASE, SAID PROFESSOR WANG ZHENFU, PROFESSORS WILL EITHER TELL THE STUDENTS TO STOP EXPLORING THE SUBJECTS ANY FURTHER OR WILL ENCOURAGE THEM TO DO RESEARCH ON THEIR OWN. "IT'S THEIR FREEDOM," HE SAID.

CREATIVE ESCAPES

¶10. (C) SOME PROFESSORS FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO INTRODUCE SENSITIVE TOPICS INTO THEIR COURSES. A WELL-KNOWN PROFESSOR AT SUN YAT-SEN UNIVERSITY, PROFESSOR AI XIAOMING, WHO RESIGNED FROM REGULAR TEACHING DUTIES UNDER PRESSURE EARLIER THIS YEAR AFTER SIGNING THE CHARTER 08, DESCRIBED ONE ASSIGNMENT SHE GAVE TO HER CLASS. USING A TEXTBOOK CONTAINING VARIOUS IMAGES THAT APPEARED IN THE MEDIA, SHE ASKED HER STUDENTS TO INTERPRET THE PICTURES AND WRITE THEIR OWN CAPTIONS. WHEN THE CLASS CAME UPON THE WORLD-FAMOUS PICTURE FROM TIANANMEN OF "THE TANK MAN," SHE TOLD HER STUDENTS THEY WERE NOT REQUIRED TO INTERPRET THAT IMAGE. TO HER SURPRISE, EVERY STUDENT IN HER CLASS COMPLETED AN INTERPRETATION. BY ALLOWING HER STUDENTS TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS, SHE WAS ABLE TO PROTECT HERSELF. "I CANNOT MISUSE MY POWER," SHE SAID.

¶11. (C) PROFESSOR AI, WHO STILL SERVES AS A SUPERVISOR FOR THE RAINBOW SOCIETY, A STUDENT ORGANIZATION AT SUN YAT-SEN UNIVERSITY THAT REPRESENTS HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS, ALSO POINTED OUT THAT HER INSTITUTION PERMITS THE ORGANIZATION TO CONDUCT AWARENESS ACTIVITIES AS AN UNREGISTERED GROUP. IN OTHER WORDS, SHE SAID, CERTAIN STUDENT ACTIVITIES TEND TO BE LESS RESTRICTED IF THEY ARE UNDERTAKEN BY ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE NOT SPONSORED BY THE UNIVERSITY.

¶12. (C) PROFESSOR WANG YUNXIANG SAID HE USES ENGLISH AS AN ESCAPE FROM THE LIMITATIONS ON HIS TEACHING. WHENEVER HIS HUMAN RIGHTS CLASS IS BEING AUDITED BY UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES, HE SPEAKS IN ENGLISH AND SPEAKS QUICKLY, KNOWING THAT HIS STUDENTS UNDERSTAND ENGLISH BUT THE AUDITORS USUALLY DO NOT.

¶13. (C) SOME ACADEMICS POINT OUT THAT THEY HAVE LESS FREEDOM TO SAY WHAT THEY WANT IN PUBLICATIONS THAN THEY DO IN THEIR CLASSROOMS. HOWEVER, PROFESSOR CHING MAYBO SAID THAT ACADEMICS WHO WRITE IN ENGLISH FOR PUBLICATION IN WESTERN COUNTRIES HAVE CONSIDERABLE LEEWAY TO ADDRESS SENSITIVE TOPICS.

¶14. (C) IN ADDITION, PROFESSOR CHING EXPLAINED THAT PUBLISHERS IN HONG KONG CAN ALSO OFFER A WAY OUT. FOR EXAMPLE, SHE SAID SHE OFTEN ARGUES WITH PUBLISHERS IN CHINA ABOUT THE USE OF CERTAIN TERMINOLOGY WHEN REFERRING TO MINORITIES IN HER WRITINGS. ALTHOUGH CHINESE PUBLISHERS WILL REQUIRE HER TO USE SPECIFIC CHINESE CHARACTERS WHEN WRITING ABOUT THESE POPULATIONS, HONG KONG PUBLISHERS DO NOT IMPOSE THE SAME RESTRICTIONS. AS A RESULT, SHE EITHER WORKS HER OWN

CONNECTIONS IN HONG KONG OR, INTERESTINGLY, RECEIVES THE ASSISTANCE OF CHINESE EDITORS TO CONNECT WITH THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN HONG KONG.

LIBERAL GUANGZHOU, RELATIVELY SPEAKING

¶15. (SBU) ON THE WHOLE, OUR CONTACTS AGREED THAT ACADEMIA IN GUANGZHOU IS MORE LIBERAL THAN IN OTHER PARTS OF CHINA. THIS MAY BE ATTRIBUTED IN LARGE PART TO GUANGZHOU'S GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY TO HONG KONG AND THE RESULTING FLOW OF INFORMATION THROUGH HONG KONG MEDIA. NEVERTHELESS, PROFESSORS IN GUANGZHOU ARE STILL FORCED TO STRIKE THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN TEACHING HONESTLY AND AVOIDING SENSITIVE POLITICAL RED LINES.